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# CHINA'S VITAL QUESTION

BY JEREMIAH W. JENKS

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WHAT is the present situation of China? That question is best answered by two quotations. The first is from the lips of the Chinese President, Yüan Shih-k'ai:

Our rights and privileges in Manchuria have suffered enormously. We are ashamed and humiliated, but our weakness invited insult. Let all the people unite and work harmoniously for the supreme object of saving the country.

The second quotation is from the lips of a brilliant Chinese, who was educated in the United States and who has just been designated China's Minister at Washington.

The Republic of China was founded only four years ago, and yet in that brief period we have seen peace and order restored and many great reforms instituted. Wide as is the domain of China, the mandates of the Government are faithfully carried out in every part of the land. There has been developed a sense of security and a sense of nationalism never known under the old régime. Under the old régime very often there were viceroys in some of the far corners of the country who would sometimes send rosy reports of conditions to Peking when all was not as it should have been in the provinces under their administration. That sort of maladministration is no longer possible. Offices are carefully filled and reports properly verified; and the result is that the central Government is looked up to with a degree of confidence and respect, and with a feeling of seriousness, which in itself is a sign of a nation that is united. The central Government is close to the hearts of all the Chinese people.

In the year 1912, the most serious problem confronting the Chinese people was the financial problem. Finance was the stumbling-block, because much money was needed for the carrying into effect of important administrative reforms, and the Government was firmly determined not to live on loans forever. The loans which were made for administrative purposes had aroused so much opposition among the people that, partly in deference to this very natural and proper public feeling, but more particularly because it was the only

sound financial plan, the Government resolved that the necessary funds for its administration must be got internally—direct from the people themselves. To this end efforts were made to ascertain exactly what were the sources and amounts of old revenue, and then new methods were devised to make certain that every cent collected from the people for the Government should be received by the Government.

From these two statements it will be seen, first, that the fear of further foreign aggression is very pronounced in China; and second, that the Government of China under its present form has accomplished very remarkable results. If such be the case, what excuse is there for changing its form?

Stripped of polite verbiage and special pleading, the answer to this question may be compressed into the fear, in part fictitious, in part genuine, that something may happen in China to remove from the helm President Yüan Shih-k'ai, and that "a presidential election is liable to cause a disturbance of the peace." The ablest opponent of the monarchist agitation, although himself avowedly a believer in the virtues of monarchy as a broad, general proposition, Mr. Liang Ch'i-ch'iao, concedes this danger in the following words: "This is quite so. And it was for that very reason that ten years ago I declined to associate myself with the advocates of republicanism." But Mr. Liang points out very truly: "Happily, a remedy against this evil has been found in the newly promulgated presidential election laws which practically provide a life-term for the president." However, as Mr. Liang admits, "what is to be feared is what will happen when the President shall have departed from our midst. This is, of course, a question which we do not wish to discuss, but since death is inevitable to every mortal being, including even the patriarchs, let us face the problem boldly. Should Heaven help China and allow the President to serve the country for more than ten years to come, during which period he will be able to regulate and cleanse official practices, resuscitate the nation's strength, consolidate the people's confidence and make a clean sweep of all visible and invisible evils, then thereafter it will be immaterial whether we have a monarchy, or a republic. On the other hand, should Heaven not bless us, but take the President away from our people ere he has half accomplished his work, then there will be nothing but ruination for China."

I am not so sure that Mr. Liang Ch'i-ch'iao is right. If,

as he and many others seem to think, the entire salvation or ruination of China, a nation of over four hundred million people, depends absolutely upon one man, then Heaven help China! I say this as one who has nothing but the highest respect, nothing but the warmest admiration, for the character and achievements of Yüan Shih-k'ai. I do believe that at the present moment, quite possibly during Yüan's lifetime, Yüan is the one man and the one alone who can most successfully guide the helm of China. But to admit that a nation of four hundred million people is capable of producing only one man with the intelligence, the tact, the wisdom, the experience and the patriotism necessary for successful leadership, is to indict the intelligence, the capacity and the patriotism of that nation. We must search somewhat deeper than this for an explanation or a justification of the promonarchist agitation. Before discussing the genesis of the monarchist movement it may be well to state briefly the facts which have led up to it, with due regard to the reasons why Yüan Shih-k'ai has become the popular custodian of Chinese hopes and confidence.

The republic of China, proclaimed in the dawn of 1912, was the outcome of three converging progressive currents. The first current originated in the China Reform Society's movement in the early nineties. It is quite true, as the advocates of Chinese monarchy allege, that that movement was not a republican movement. But it is not true that even in 1893-95 there were no republicans among the daring and active spirits of the China Reform Society. The movement took its political color from the views of its chiefs, Mr. K'ang Yu-wei and Mr. Liang Ch'i-ch'iao, who hoped to influence, along progressive lines, and particularly through the operation of a liberal constitution which they advocated, the existing Manchu dynasty. They did succeed in influencing the Emperor, Kwang Hsü, and thus came the memorable, if brief, Reform Era of the autumn of 1898. How far they might have gone in saving China while saving the Manchus if the young Emperor had been a little less radical, and his willingness to progress slowly a little more marked, it is, of course, needless and useless to speculate upon. The Empress Tzū Hsi, incited by the conservative and reactionary leaders, crushed the reform movement in the bud. While this movement was going forward, more radical southern Chinese were gradually developing strength under independent lead-

ership. A series of events and circumstances placed at their head Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the "Peter the Hermit" of China's reform crusade. Sun roamed the globe talking reform and republicanism among the Chinese scattered abroad. And while he was thus engaged, while Mr. K'ang Yu-wei and Mr. Liang Ch'i-ch'iao were exiles from China with a price on their heads, as the third element named above, there were in the north of China, as well as in the south, Manchu and Chinese officials who recognized that progress and reform were necessary if China was to be saved from the "break-up" prophesied in Lord Charles Beresford's celebrated book. Most conspicuous among these progressive officials was Yüan Shih-k'ai.

The character and career of Yüan Shih-k'ai, like the character and career of Napoleon, are twin-subjects for a multitude of books. As long ago as 1888, when Yüan Shih-k'ai was Chinese Resident at Seoul, this great man, born in Changtehfu, Honan, in 1859, had begun to impress Chinese and foreigners as a force to be reckoned with when figuring out the future of China.

The former protégé of Li Hung-chang, he was the center of the Peking palace cabal in those stormy autumn days of 1898 when the Empress, Tzū Hsi, took back the power from the Emperor, Kwang Hsü, when he was striving over-hastily to modernize the Empire against the judgment and will of "the old Buddha." It was to Yüan Shih-k'ai that Kwang Hsü made the proposal to arrest and imprison the Empress. Yüan had organized and drilled China's first model army. It was a redoubtable force, which both factions desired to employ. But Yüan owed his preferment and power to the good graces of Tzū Hsi and the friendly offices of Tzū Hsi's favorite, Jung Lu, Yüan's "blood-brother." He threw in his lot with and bared his sword for the Empress Dowager, arousing the consequent enmity of Kwang Hsü and the weak but well-meaning Emperor's partisans. That was why Yüan was degraded and insulted by the regent, Ch'un, after the death of Kwang Hsü and of the Empress Dowager, who had really, largely under the influence of Yüan Shih-k'ai, set herself at the head of a genuine reform movement, though not a foolishly radical one. Kwang Hsü's testament was a virtual order to Ch'un that Yüan should be disgraced and beheaded. But Ch'un, although regent and the father of the baby Emperor, P'u Yi, dared not menace the life of Yüan Shih-k'ai.

Every foreigner in China, and even those Chinese who resented Yüan's part in the palace contest, conceded the power and respected the wisdom of the man who, by unwavering persistence in what he believed to be his duty towards China, had become the strongest force in China. From the highest office in the land Yüan went into retirement, to emerge during the crisis of 1911 as the last prop of Manchu authority. It is entirely possible that if Yüan had so desired, he could have completely crushed the southern rebellion of 1911, as two years later he crushed that of 1913. But Yüan seems to have looked with an eye centered singly upon China's welfare. And so it came about that the edicts of abdication were issued on February 12, 1912, that on February 14 Dr. Sun Yat-sen resigned from the presidency of the southern republic, and that on February 15 Yüan Shih-k'ai was elected President of all China. He was inaugurated in Peking on March 10. From this brief sketch, it will be seen that Yüan Shih-k'ai actually represents the third of those three currents which, converging in 1912, caused the Chinese republic. He accepted the republic: he did not create it; and the republic accepted Yüan Shih-k'ai.

Owing to the unpractical visionary schemes of the members and their blocking of practical work the President was compelled to take matters very largely into his own hands. He suppressed the Parliament by mandate, when he might have suppressed it by brute force, as Oliver Cromwell suppressed the British Parliament at the crucial point in his career. I give this analogy, because others have compared the Chinese situation with that of England under Cromwell. If we are to stick to technicalities, it would probably be an accepted fact that Yüan has usurped authority. And it is therefore all the more remarkable that even the most vociferous Chinese radical republican assents to this usurpation. Foreigners in China not merely justify Yüan's acts, but they want to see him move even more rapidly in the direction of concentrating power within his own hands. It is well to remember that the foreigners doing business in China have so much faith in Yüan Shih-k'ai that in 1912 the bankers' syndicate lent China one hundred and twenty-five millions of dollars without the approval of the legislature, and with grave doubt as to the technical legality of the act. That is a very remarkable testimony to Yüan's credit, even though, of course, the bankers knew that the Govern-

ments of their powerful countries were back of them and that the security was ample. Now let us turn to the genesis of the pro-monarchist movement.

The most active leader of the monarchists is Mr. Yang Tu, who has been at least the visible and outward director of the monarchist organization, the Chou-an Huei (or "Peace Promotion Society") from its inception. Yang Tu was a subordinate lieutenant of Mr. K'ang Yu-wei and Mr. Liang Ch'i-ch'iao in 1898. He accompanied these great constitutional monarchists into exile in Japan. A little later, however, when "the old Buddha" found it desirable to conciliate the constitutionalists, an emissary was sent by the Manchus to Tokyo, and Mr. Yang Tu returned to Peking as a Manchu official. The Chinese assert that he then became a very active apologist for the Manchus. But they say that Mr. Yang was one of the first to abandon the Manchus when Yüan went to their rescue.

It was while Dr. Goodnow was in Tokyo on his way to Peking that the first manifestations of the monarchist movement became evident. Japanese journalists talked to Dr. Goodnow about it. Dr. Goodnow declined to commit himself in any definite way. The manifesto of the Chou-an Huei, published in Peking on August 16, took as its text the memorandum written by Dr. Goodnow and presented to Yüan Shih-k'ai after Dr. Goodnow's arrival in Peking. Now, it is alleged by some of the opponents of monarchy in China, apparently on excellent authority, although to me it seems doubtful, that this manifesto was actually prepared by an official of the Japanese legation at Peking, and if this is a fact, it is very important. Because, in considering the origin as well as the merits of the monarchist agitation, it will not do to close one's eyes to what has recently come to pass between Japan and China. I hope, for Japan's sake as well as for the sake of China, that there will be no recurrence of the crisis of last May, when Japan menaced China by force, and, to quote the Chinese President, "humiliated China." But, to cite a Chinese saying, "What has passed is written on the jade-stone of life."

It is interesting to read the following expression of opinion by Count Okuma, the Japanese Prime Minister, uttered on September 3:

A nation, having failed in establishing a republican government, becomes inclined toward a monarchy. As to who the Chinese nation

are going to crown, it should be the one first and foremost in the power of controlling China. From this point of view, it may seem natural that President Yüan Shih-k'ai should be enthroned. As to Japan's attitude toward the present situation in China, the Prime Minister sees no reason for intervention in such home affairs of the Chinese nation. If, however, Japanese interests in China are threatened, or the *status quo* affected, the monarchical movement should not be held as without concern. Anyhow, it is wise for us to take an attitude of watching and waiting for the present.

Some Chinese there are who read possible menace into the last two sentences of this statement. I hope that their forebodings are unjustified, but the Japanese demands look menacing and the late readiness to protest against the change do not lessen the menace.

Before taking up the question of how the movement has been received in China by Chinese and foreigners, it may be well to quote the following dispatch printed throughout the Orient on September 8:

The monarchical campaign is likely to be arrested in consequence of the Presidential message to the Tsancheng Yuan on September 6. The main cause of this step on the part of the President is said to be diplomatic circumstances. It is stated that a few days ago Admiral Tsai Ting-kan was dispatched to sound the Ministers to Peking. *The German Minister is reported to have stated that China would have to participate in the Peace Conference after the war, though its ending is not yet anticipated, and that if the war was over before the new Government of the restored monarchy was recognized by the Powers, China would be in danger of losing a voice in the conference with great loss on the part of China.* Consequently, a private meeting was held in the President's office on the 5th of September, as a result of which Yang Shih-chi, the senior Under-Secretary of State, was dispatched to the Tsancheng Yuan on the following day, declaring that the President himself holds an opinion against the restoration of a monarchy, as President of the republic. Thus, the monarchical campaign is apparently checked, but some alterations will be made in the regulations for election of president, by the enactment of the permanent constitution.

The President's message referred to was as follows:

It is now four years since I was entrusted by the people with the office of President of the Chinese republic. During these troublous years, fearing my ability to be equal to the task, I have labored with much misgiving and anxiety and have looked forward to the time when I shall be relieved and permitted to retire, but so long as I am in my present position it is my constant duty and responsibility, which admit of no evasion, to protect the country and people.



It is my special duty to maintain the republic as the form of government.

Recently many citizens from the provinces have petitioned the acting Li Fah Yuan to change the form of government, a matter of State which is incompatible with my position as President; but as the office of president was conferred by the people, it should of course depend on the will of the people. Moreover, since the acting Li Fah Yuan is an independent organ and as such is free from outside interference, I should not, strictly speaking, express my views before the people, the country, or the acting Li Fah Yuan. As however any alteration in the form of government makes a radical and important change in the executive power and as I am chief executive, I feel, even at the risk of misinterpretation of my motives, that I cannot remain silent.

In my opinion, a change in the form of Government involves such a momentous change in the manifold relations of the State that it is a matter which demands most careful and serious consideration. If decided upon hastily serious obstacles will arise. It being my duty to maintain the general situation, I regard the proposed change as unsuitable to the circumstances of the country.

As to the petition of our citizens, their object is of course nothing other than to strengthen the foundation of the State and increase the prestige of the country. If the opinion of the majority of the people of the country is consulted, good and proper means will undoubtedly be found.

Furthermore, as the constitution of the republic is now being drafted, by due consideration of the conditions of the country, careful thought and mature discussion, a suitable and practicable law will be devised.

This is explicit, and nothing has since occurred to weaken the position assumed by the Chinese President. Recently a cablegram came from Peking explaining the steps being taken by the Chinese Government to ascertain the will of the people. In this cablegram Yüan Shih-k'ai tells us that the "reply of the Government" to petitions received advocating the restoration of monarchy "was that the matter should be referred to the national assembly for determination. But the people of the different provinces objected to this delay, which would be caused by convening the national assembly, and urged that the will of the nation could be ascertained by a quicker method. The Council of State, in compliance with the wishes of the people for a quicker decision, has made arrangements to secure such decision without delay. Now, the political powers of the republic of China rest with

the people of the country. It is therefore for the people to decide what form of government they want."

The mandate then goes on to explain the organization of the national convention authorized on October 6:

The provinces and other special political divisions of the country shall elect in all 1,834 representatives, each district being entitled to at least one representative.

Representation was also provided for Inner and Outer Mongolia, Tibet, Tsinghai, Eastern Turkestan, Manchuria, Mongolians and Chinese belonging to the eight banners, trade guilds within China and Chinese residing abroad, men who have rendered important patriotic service to the country, and the literati of old and Young China. These special classes were to elect one hundred and eighty-six representatives in all. Generally, the suffrage has been restricted to those authorized to vote for the national assembly.

Yüan Shih-k'ai suppressed the Kuomintang as a seditious organization because the Kuomintang plotted his destruction. There are Chinese of great ability and admitted patriotism who have expressed the opinion that upon the same principle he should have suppressed the Chou-an Huei. A distinguished English newspaper correspondent at Peking (Mr. William H. Donald) has said:

The military party have been at the bottom of the movement for the re-establishment of the monarchical system of government from the outset. Ever since the establishment of the republic the President has been periodically approached by high military officials and urged to change the system of government. Invariably he replied that as a republic had been definitely established, it would be gravely improper for him even to discuss such a step. But, while their personal loyalty to the President has in no way diminished, the military officials have of late become more and more insistent, and as they were practically unanimous, it was impossible for the President with the solemn duty of preserving internal peace and concord always before him to dismiss them with a blank refusal. He was faced by a powerful body holding very emphatic views, and if he had persisted in an irreconcilable attitude, the result would probably have been the inception of intrigues and the formation of secret societies to bring about by force what he refused to grant. The President, therefore, was faced by a very difficult problem. The most despotic and autocratic ruler, if all his most powerful supporters were united in a desire to compel him to take a certain course, would not be able forcibly to resist them. That was exactly the position in which President Yüan Shih-k'ai found himself. He could not openly resist the

demand made by the military party, the most powerful force in the State, but he could, and did, divert its activities into a proper and constitutional channel.

The Presidential message was in effect an intimation to the military clique that they must not take matters into their own hands and usurp the prerogatives of the people. They were told by the President in conciliatory but firm words that they must await the assembling of a National Convention. It is a remarkable demonstration of the real power exercised by the President that the military party, strong though it is, has acquiesced in its subordination to the people in general. The wise and prudent action taken by the President has prevented the problem respecting the form of government being solved by a military *coup d'état*, and has made possible a solution by the legally constituted organ of the people.

There seems to be a good deal of truth in what Mr. Donald says. He is a very fair-minded observer, and has proved himself both loyal and courageous in his interpretation of Chinese conditions.

From the first the country plunged into the discussion with a degree of warmth to be expected, considering the subject, even from such a cool-headed people as the Chinese. On September 2 Peking newspapers announced strong opposition on the part of Mr. Hsu Shih-chang, the Secretary of State, a long time friend and former protégé of the President, the Vice-President, Mr. Li Yuan-hung, Mr. Wang Ta-hsien, Vice-Chairman of the State Council, Mr. Chao Hsui-si, Minister of Finance, General Wang Shih-chen, Minister of War, and Mr. Tang Hua-lung, the Minister of Education. By common consent the opponents of monarchy seemed to turn for the formulation of their views to China's Jean Jacques Rousseau, Mr. Liang Ch'i-ch'iao, a monarchist, as I have said, and the connecting link between the present republic and the China Reform movement of the early nineties. I have read with great interest Mr. Liang's exhaustive criticism as published in the *Ta Chung Hua*.

Mr. Liang takes occasion to make two points clear to his readers. "I am not an upstart Jacobin, intoxicated with republican ideas," he says, "and am therefore neither in favor of the republican form of government nor prejudiced against any other." "Secondly," he says, "I am no bigoted conservative who clings to any particular dynasty like the heroes of Shou Yang and like Lu Lien." "No form of government is absolutely ideal," contends this brilliant Chinese scholar,—who, it is well to remember, resigned from

the Chinese cabinet and from the vice-chairmanship of the constitutional committee in order to assert his views for the benefit of his countrymen. Mr. Liang has always opposed resort to force or revolution in any manner. But the strength of his opposition to the monarchical movement rests in the following statement: "My view is that if China is really in earnest for a constitution, the President should set the example himself by treating the constitutional compact as sacredly inviolable. Every letter of the compact should be carried out, and no attempt should be made to step beyond its limits." In other words, according to Mr. Liang, for weal or for woe China has ranged herself among the republics, and it is as futile as it is dangerous to discuss a restoration.

What have the monarchists to say for themselves? The extreme pro-monarchist view is stated in this editorial, printed in *Kuo Hwa Pao*, asserting the "divine right of Kings":

If a throne is open for competition, there will not be lacking men who will compete for it; and the consequence of such a competition or struggle for the seat of power is internal disturbance. The presidency is a position which can be competed for by any person, but the position of emperor cannot be competed for.

A point which is made by writers on both sides is the necessity for a peaceful solution. And another distinguished Chinese writer, Mr. Hsu Fo-su, adduces the "triangular argument" that "a revolution will surely bring forth a republic; and a republic, because of distraction and disagreement, will as surely bring about the destruction of the nation." The editor of *Shih Pao* opposes to that view another "triangular argument." He says, "If a man opposes the monarchical movement and says that he has been an advocate of the monarchical system, he is open to mediation, and a man who is open to mediation is also capable of joining the Chou-an Huei. What do you say to that, Mr. Hsu?" Thus, while the cables tell us of bombs having been thrown, and several pro-monarchists assassinated out of hand, the Chinese vernacular newspapers would indicate that there is considerable good humor being manifested on both sides of the controversy.

Whatever the result of this agitation, it disposes very completely of assertions made from time to time that Yüan Shih-k'ai has "throttled the press in China." The news-

papers are talking out just as our newspapers would under similar circumstances.

Are the majority of the Chinese and foreign observers in China too hasty in guessing what Yüan Shih-k'ai means to do? What are his intentions? No man knows. But sometime we may judge a man's intentions from his past. Yüan saved his ruler, the Empress dowager, from her young kinsman by marriage, the Emperor Kwang Hsü. Yüan saved the imperial son of his inveterate enemy, Ch'un, the regent. There is a Chinese President of the Chinese Republic who lives in the winter palace at Peking. Within rifle shot of Yüan's residence lives the little Manchu Emperor and the Manchu princes and their retainers. For, although it is frequently forgotten, when the republic began four years ago in China, the Manchu Emperor was retained in his title and his civil list. He is a pensioner of the Chinese Republic. It is a point to be remembered. Is Yüan Shih-k'ai planning to safeguard the republic against forces from without and within which seek either to restore the Manchu dynasty or to plunge China into disruption or disaster?

Already he has defied the military cabal. I am told on very good authority that his old friend Marshal Feng Kuo-chang, Chiang Ch'un (or Provostmarshal) of Kiangsu and Marshal Lu Ying-ting, Chiang Ch'un of Kiangsi, are standing by the republicans; and their example is likely to be followed by other able and popular army leaders. The wisdom and patriotism of Yüan Shih-k'ai have not as yet failed China. Is there any real reason for thinking that he will fail now? Thrice during the Manchu crisis he declined a marquissate, and twice when the late Empress Lung Yu invited him to ascend the throne he refused. The elections seem to show that a crown will be offered to Yüan Shih-k'ai; it may be that real public opinion ascertained for him in other ways will declare to the contrary. In either case it may well be that Yüan Shih-k'ai will confound those who, throughout his career, have accused him of plotting and planning for his own ambition; that he will consolidate at his back the growing strength of southern Chinese progressive opinion; and so at last find himself free to carry into effect, with the certainty of popular approval, those great practical reforms which are vitally necessary in China, in order that she may stand upon her own feet and be no longer menaced by fear of foreign aggression.

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